



## Citation

### Sharon Welch

Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa*

Exemplary teacher, elegant thinker, energetic activist, evocative writer, intercultural artisan, inspirational leader...Dr. Sharon Welch is the most innovative feminist social ethicist in recent decades.

She received her master's and doctoral degrees from Vanderbilt, and then, from '82 to '91, she taught at Harvard Divinity School, where she served as assistant and then associate professor of theology and religion and society; from '91 to 2007, she was Professor and Chair of Rel Stds and Prof of Women's and Gender Studies at U. Mizzou.

Sharon is the author of numerous articles, chapters, and six books, the most recent of which was published by NYU Press in January, *After the Protests are Heard: Enacting Civic Engagement and Social Transformation*.

Her work is regularly taught in religious studies departments and theological schools across the nation...

She is frequently invited to give lectures and lead workshops across the country, and has received numerous awards, including, just a few weeks ago, the alumna of the year award from Vanderbilt Divinity School.

Sharon also has a long history as a peace and racial justice activist, going back to her student days...currently, she is a member of the Unitarian Universalist Peace Ministry Network, a steering committee member for the League of Women Voters of Chicago, and is engaged in numerous other ways as an activist public intellectual.

In 2007, under President Barker's leadership, Sharon came to Meadville to serve as Provost and Professor of Religion and Society. Under her tenure, Sharon led Meadville through the most significant transformation of its 175-year history. Guided by her wisdom and commitments, we grounded our new educational model in praxis and integrated multicultural social change methodologies into every aspect of our curriculum. As a result of Sharon's transformative leadership, our enrollment increased, our students received a more deeply formative education, and Meadville Lombard became recognized as a leading innovator in progressive theological education. Although Sharon retired from Meadville in 2017, we are grateful that she continues to serve as Affiliate Professor, and she will always be honored as one of Meadville's most historically pivotal faculty leaders.

In all her scholarship, teaching, and activism, Sharon blends the philosophical and the personal, she binds the prophetic to the practical, and she bridges disciplines and traditions. Her driving concern in all of this, as she puts this in *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, is "how to live ethically in a world of expediency, how

to stand for justice in a world of exploitation, how to act with compassion in a world of indifference, cynicism, and despair.” (13)

In addition to her numerous professional accomplishments, Sharon is also a dear friend and thought partner—she is quick to laughter and care, devoted to her family and friends, and ever excited about some new book or upcoming conference...

To know and work with Sharon Welch is to have one’s mind, as well as one’s bibliography, continuously expanded, and to have one’s heart deepened and enlarged...it is to become more attuned to the complexities of the world, more committed to the critique of all that is dishonorable, degrading and dehumanizing, and more fiercely resolved to risk the work of one’s life on the wager, ever uncertain, that we can all do better by one another, and that in doing so, we can mold the world into the shape of love and justice.

As Sharon Welch gives witness in her everyday life, an ethic of risk such as this is not only a condition for a life of meaning and responsibility, but also of sacred blessing and joy. So, Sharon, thank you for blessing us all these past years with your wisdom, your integrity, your good humor, your intelligence and passion, your leadership, and your friendship.

President Barker, I am honored to present **Doctor Sharon Welch** for the degree, **Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa***.

*Michael S. Hogue, Ph.D.*  
Professor of Theology, Ethics, and Philosophy of Religion